

Athenian News:

O R,

Dunton's Oracle.

 From Saturday August the 12th, to Tuesday August the 15th, 1710.

The Knaw-Post: Or, the Picture of a Critick.

— *Et si non aliqua nocuisses mortuus esses.* Virg.

I Might justly be esteem'd but one Degree remote from a Madman, thus to go to Loggerheads with the *Criticks*, and oppose their Infallibility at my own Peril, unless I was very well assur'd, that howsoever my own Abilities may be unequal to the Subject, yet I shall certainly find more effectual Assistants, who labour under the same Sentence and Misfortunes. All Prejudices I utterly denounce, and as I am unbiass'd my self, in my Opinion, I care as little for the Opinion of those who are always known to insult the best of Men; therefore I approve of the Heroine's Advice to her *Amazonian* Sister.

Ad fidem tu pone manus, & dicito, fact, Jade.

Carm. Macaron. Editio ult. Parisius. 1653.

A *Critick* in Learning and the Sciences, is like a Fop in external Habits, both endowed with the same admirable Qualities of admiring none but themselves, and both of the same intrinsic Value: The Fop, if by Chance, out of his condescending Curiosity, he espies from *Will's* Balcony, either a faithful Pair of old Shooe-strings, or an ancient modell'd Wastecoat with knotted Fringe, flies immediately to the refuge of his Snuff-Box, or Essence-Bottle to revive his Spirits, and perhaps gives a Squint on his own brocaded Wastecoat; indeed the modern *Critick* is a little more active, for he boldly and resolutely draws his Pen, like the fam'd *Draucansir*, attacks Friend and Foe, ancient and modern, and whets his Teeth, tho' according to *Horace*, he has little Reason to shew them,

Hic niger est, hunc tu, Romane caveto.

not forgetting to recommend his own Excellencies obliquely.

Tho' the Kingdom of *Criticism* is vastly extensive, and perhaps the *Critick* has Empire enough of his own, to exercise his Authority and Severity in, yet it is too narrow for his ambitious Mind. Contributions must be rais'd from every Province to maintain the Warrior, and each single City must assist with Ammunition to defend the Hero; tho' the Comparison will be more just, if joyn'd to the *Italian Banditti*, for there are Laws of Arms, but none of *Criticism*: Tho' their Family be ancient, and very regularly successive; Histories are silent in many particulars, concerning them, a late Author has hinted at their Pedigree, but he found himself deficient, and was forc'd to make use of &c. as Boys are said to express their Meaning by their Mumping. The Race soon spread it self, like the wandering Jews, thro' every Country; and Men at first were more regular and careful in their Composures, till that Art, like many others felt the Effects of Time and barbarous Invasions: At this Day we have some Sketches of it; for the *English Criticks* are fam'd for genteel Railery, the *French* for unmannerly and sarcastical Compliments, and the *Dutch* for good Paper good Print, and a good sizeable Volume: It fares with the *Critick* generally, as it does with a Fire-ship, which consisting of the most combustible and useless Matter, drives headlong among the *Men of War*, and falls foul on all Sorts and Sizes, but chiefly on those whose Ruin will be most Advantageous and honourable: How long did the *Dutch* Commentators exercise their Tongues and Hands, before it was universally agreed upon, whether *Horace* had a Mother or no? What Volume

lumes and Treatises were spun out before such a weighty Point could be adjusted; but yet all agreed as unanimously in censuring the Poet's Defects, as a late Author did in his own, who to set the Press forward, wrote an insignificant Treatise upon a trivial Subject, and when it was universally condemn'd and neglected, afterwards publish'd a very significant Reply to it, wherein, under a borrow'd Name, he expos'd his own Nonsense with good Success, and made *Martial's* Observation true,

Cum tu rescribas, incipit ille legi.

But the *Criticks* are still unhappier, in that they can have no Partners in their Miseries, tho' they are Brother-Saints by Profession and Friends in Mischief, yet the Flames of each other's Fury, like those of *Etecles* and *Polynices*, separate, and hold no Communion with one another.— All their mutual Acquaintance is to learn their Defects, and all their Love is in exposing one another, as if others Loss were their Gain, or if, like the *Tartars*, by dispatching some comely and proper Person, they were to inherit his Accomplishments. Has not *Belz—o* travell'd over all the *World of Learning*, like *Sir Francis Drake*, and upon the same Grounds, which some call Plunder? Has he not fall'n foul upon every Rock, nay, even the *Bishop and his six Clerks*, to shew what Substance his Bark is made of, and to bid Defiance to Danger? Tho' his Talent lies in agreeable Railery, and want of Ceremony, his Modesty has assum'd the Office of *Master of the Ceremonies*, to introduce his young *Plants* into the Favour of the learned.

Belz—o has been the *Quixot* of the Age, and out of blind Zeal, to shew his Courage, has routed his Friends for his Foes, has frequently assulted Paper-Mills, and with the silent Eloquence of one Pinch of true Spanish, can change the Nature as well as Truth of an Argument, which shews that it is the *Snuff*, and not the *Brain* which makes the *Critick*: Such infallible Proofs as these, may perhaps prove the Ancients not only to have been insipid and tasteless, but never to have been at all, and that such Doctrines are idle Imaginations, and contemptible Ideas. How inconsiderable would *Richard* the Tyrant's Vision, the Night before *Bosworth* Battle, appear, should all the Ghosts of murder'd Poets and Writers joyn together in a firm Battalion, and break in upon *Belz—o's* Midnight Projection. And might not the Story of King *John*, and the

Miller, or at least some Circumstances of it, however diverting in former Times, be equall'd by a more modern Allusion? In fine, our *Critick* employs a greater Part of Life in judiciously observing the *Absurdities* of a Poem, than the Author himself in perfecting the *Beauties*; and I may venture to affirm, that the Effects of both their Labours are as distinctly contrary as the Labours themselves.

Thus I have briefly shewn you the *Knew-Post*, i. e. Given you the *Picture of a Critick*; if you'd see his Effigies more at length, view it in this Light: Your right *Critick* masters Objects, and is never master'd by them; he presently sounds the Bottom of the profoundest Depth. He knows very well (that's thinks he knows) how to make the Anatomy of Mens Capacities: Let him but look upon a Man, and he'll dive into the Depth of him, and know him thoroughly: He deciphers all the Secrets of the closest Heart, he is quick in conceiving, severe in censuring, and judicious in drawing his Consequences; he discovers all, observes all, and comprehends all; but it is to be observed, that there is great Difference betwixt common criticising and backbiting, for the one is grounded upon Indifference, and the other upon Malice; but as the *Critick's* condemning of every thing, is an insupportable Extravagance of Mind, so on the other hand, the approving all Things is the silliest Piece of Pedantry: However every Thing is good or bad, according to the Whimsy of the *Critick*; and take Notice there are as many Opinions as Faces, and as great Difference amongst the one as the other: The Quarrel about our Saviour's *descention into Hell* hath (possibly) sent many a Man thither to see; nothing breeds more Atheists among us than a vain criticising: The *Arminian* will find a Reason in us of God's Decrees. The *Socinians* will have a Reason to us of his Mysteries, *Except they see, they will not believe* (*John* 20. 28.) and so Faith is become, as some of these *Criticks* have made bold to call it *Theologorum Ludibrium Scripturarum Tyrannidem*: But I wou'd ask these *Socinians*, *Why may we not apprehend some Things by Faith, which we cannot reach by Reason?* But be the *Critick*, either right or wrong in his Judgment, this is certain (Reader) there is no Fault without an Adherent, and thou oughtest not to be discouraged, if what thou doest, pleases not some, seeing there will always be others who will value it; but be not proud of the Approbation of these, since you will be still exposed to the Censure of others. There cannot be a plainer Instance

stance of this, than the Clashing of Philosophers in their Opinions. For one *Hypothesis* is no sooner out, but 'tis suck'd up, like their Notions of the *Planets*, by a greater Force and *Gravitation* of another. We have seen a *Des-Cartes* run down, whose Reputation is absorb'd by the more prevailing Power of new *Theories*; tho' if we take a View of them, we shall find they have not had the Happiness of giving any greater Satisfaction. The saying *something New and Surprising*, makes such Speculations at first to be in Vogue, and gives them a Reputation; but a little Time wears this off, and then Men find they are just as wise as they were before. There's no End of such *Philosophical Solutions*; and indeed the Reason is, because there is no sure treading at the Beginning; the Natures of Things being to us wholly unaccountable. Had God design'd us for so critical a Search into his World, he wou'd have given us other Senses, and not such as can skim only the Surface, but can go no deeper. There is one Thing hath advanc'd the Reputation of such Speculations, and that is, the *Mathematical Learning*, with which they appear in the World. But notwithstanding this, it is not in the Power of that Science, to give us any clearer Account of the Nature of Things; and how high soever we may imagin to soar by the help of this, I doubt such Things as these will still be above us. The *Criticks* may calculate as long as they please, the Force and Power of Bodies; but this will never make the Natures of them the more known, or Natural Philosophy the less uncertain. And 'tis observable, that *Des-Cartes*, whose Principles are now out of Repute, was himself no mean *Mathematician*; and altho' the Masters of this Science are agreed in the Demonstrations which properly belong unto it; yet that they are not so in their Observations upon Nature, their different *Hypotheses* are so many undeniable Instances; which shews, that tho' as *Mathematicians*, yet they have not hitherto agreed as *Natural Philosophers*. It may be demonstrably prov'd, that the World was created; but when we go about to dive into the Manner of it, there indeed we are wholly at a Loss; and we shew more *Vanity and Presumption* in our Reasonings, than Truth and Solidity. A Man wou'd smile at the Folly of that *Critick* that shou'd pretend to give an Account of the curious Make of a Watch, when he hardly knows how to wind it up; and yet we are so far from knowing how the World was created, that it is to be question'd, whether we understand the most ordinary Appearances in it; the Structure of the least

Insect being able to baffle the greatest Philosopher. 'Tis the Observation of a Noble Person (*and of one, who knew as much of Nature, as any whatever*) that we are not so competent Judges of *Wisdom*, as we are of *Justice and Veracity*; for these last nam'd, are to be estimated by eternal and fixed Bounds or Rules, which are very intelligible to a moderate Understanding; but as for *Wisdom*, the more profound it is, the less we are able to look thro' it, and penetrating to the Bottom of it, to judge knowingly of its Actions. Thus far that great Man. And it wou'd become our modern *Criticks*, to imitate him in his Modesty, as well as in that Search which he made in Nature. Philosophy, as well as Religion, teacheth a Man to be humble and modest; he that makes this his Study, will find his greatest Discoveries to be those of his *Weakness and Ignorance*. Such an Ignorance, as appears after a strict and rational Search into the Mysteries either of Nature or Revelation, is the true Mother both of Devotion in Religion, and Modesty in Philosophy; and we need not be afraid of being thought either *Papists* in the one, or *Aristotelians* in the other; and therefore the *Know-Post*, (or conceited *Critick*) is no Oracle to Men of Sense. The Rule whereby to know what deserves Esteem is the Approbation of Men of Worth, and of such as are capable of being good Judges of the Thing: The Civil and Philosophick Life, moves not upon one single Opinion, nor upon one single Custom, and yet how dogmatical are some of our modern *Know-Posts*, and how have they, as 'twere Tainted the Arts and Sciences, for,

1. Some *Criticks* there are, who spend their whole Time in *Grammar and Rhetorick*, i. e. in learning to speak well, but do not in the least think nor allow themselves any small Portion of their Time to think, how they may live well. Others there are who are so busie in finding out the Riddles of a Logical *Sphinx*, that they examine all the Trifles and Impertinences of Reasons, to find out what Reason is, and in the Search thereof, oftentimes lose themselves and their Reason too: Others there are, who by *Arithmetick* learn to divide every thing into the most minute Fractions, and yet are so bad Proficients, that they do not know how to divide a Half-penny with a Brother in Way of Charity. Many there are, who by the Help of *Geometry* can give Limits to Grounds, and separate them from one another, who can measure Cities and Countries, and yet cannot attain so far, as by any Rule to measure themselves. The *Musical Critick* can bring different

ferent Voices and Tones into one Harmony, and yet all the while have nothing that is harmonious in his own Mind, nothing, which by Reason of the Perturbations of his Mind, doth not run counter to all Musical Measures. The *Astronomer*, whilst with fixed Eyes he looketh up to Heaven, and seriously vieweth the Motion of the Stars, stumbles and falls into the next Ditch; foretelling things to come, he loseth those that are present; though with fixed Eyes he looks up to Heaven, yet hath he a Mind which is stuck fast in the Mire of this World. The *Philosopher* disputeth gravely and accurately of the Nature of Things, and yet cannot attain to the Knowledge of himself. The *Physical Critick* takes Care of the Health of others, but as to the Knowledge of the Diseases of his own Mind, he is as blind as a Beetle; he very well knows the Beating and Alteration of his own Pulse, but how to cure the burning Fever of his Mind (to which all his Thoughts in the first Place ought to have been converted) he knows nothing of it, nor in the least regards it. The *Historian* hath the *Theban* and *Trojan* Wars at his Fingers Ends, but is wholly ignorant of what more nearly concerns him. The *Lawyer* maketh Laws for all the World, but he cannot make any Law for himself.

The *Divine*, (or *Reverend Critick*), earnestly contends for, and disputeth about the Faith, but never thinks of Charity; he speaks much of God, but to help his Neighbour in Time of Need, he regards not. *Arts* and *Sciences* therefore do indeed weary the Minds of the *Criticks* with continual Labour, but yield them no Ease nor Quiet. By how much our Minds are filled with Knowledge, by so much we desire more, nor doth any Science take away those Controversies, which distract the Minds of Men, nor remove those Cares and Troubles which perpetually vex them. *Arts* and *Sciences* do indeed polish the Minds of Men, but they do not free them from Vices and Diseases. Learning doth indeed cultivate Men, and make 'em *Criticks*, but it doth not make 'em good, nor truly wise. To all which we may add, that by how much the greater Knowledge we attain unto, by so much we know how small Proficients we have

been; by how much the Mind is filled with knowledge, by so much the more it knows its own Emptiness: how great soever the Knowledge of Men may be in this World, it is only of the least Part of those Things which we are ignorant of; so that the highest Pitch which our Wisdom can attain unto, is to know our own Ignorance and Want of Knowledge; the Top of Man's Perfection here, consists in the Knowledge of his Imperfection, which whosoever attaineth to, is endued with greater Wisdom than others, and may be reckoned the most perfect.

Then sure I am, 'tis great Folly in the *Knave-Post* (or empty *Critick*) to take Pleasure in blasting the Reputation of others, or to talk of their Ignorance and Want of Learning, when they are themselves just so wise as to know nothing, or at most nothing but Names (as I prov'd at large in my *Ignorant Post*) but some *Criticks* are willing to wash out, or at least to cover their Stains, by exposing those of others; they ease the Sense of their own Defects, by considering that others have Faults also; which (as wise as such *Criticks* may think themselves) is no better than the Consolation of Fools: This is certain, there is no Man Living, but hath some Original Failing; then let our *Knave-Post* take heed, that he be not a Register of Calumnies, for such a *Critick* sets up for a very spiteful Pattern, and is the worst Sort of Blockhead, as he is in reality both Knave and Fool.

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IN next Oracle will be inserted, *The Catholick Post: Or, News from Rome.*

⚔ About a Week hence will be published the general Title, Preface and Index to the First Volume of *Dunton's Oracle.*

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